

Camden and St Pancras

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Neighbours support squatters' court battle

SQUATTERS, locked in a legal wrangle with Camden Council, have won the support of the Kentish Town community in their fight to stay in their makeshift home.

Residents and neighbours are backing the group of over 20 homeless people, saying that in the last month they have shown more concern for the Leighton Road property than the council have in years.

Camden Council are taking the squatters to the Royal Courts of Justice this Friday in an attempt to get them out of the council-owned house.

But local residents say they want the squatters to stay until it decides what to do with the building.

Many have written letters of support to the court, including local historian Gillian Tindall.

She said she had been 'struck by the contrast between Camden Council's attitude and the energy

and responsibility shown to date by the squatters'.

According to residents, the building, part of which is listed, was last used in the late 1980s.

Since then it has been left by the council to become squalid and semi-derelict.

Alarms continually went off, drunks roamed about and the fire brigade were called out to fires there.

But since the squatters moved in four weeks ago, they have repaired and tidied the building.

The group says it wants to set the house up as a Community Housing Action Zone, providing housing and self help for the homeless — and a space where local community groups

by **DENISE WINTERMAN**

could get together.

"It is ridiculous," said spokesman Pete.

"The building has been empty for years and the council have no plans for it but they won't even listen to our plans or visit us.

Community

"We want to use it to help the community.

"We don't want it for ever but we want to stay until the council decide what they are doing with it.

"The building was in a terrible state — if it had been left for another winter it would have been beyond repair.

"We have done it up and intend to look after it.

"We have got the support of the community, who are pleased we are here."

But Camden Council say the squatters have no valid reason



● The squatters protest outside the Royal Courts of Justice last Thursday.

to be in the building.

"They cannot occupy a building and say in return they will supply services they haven't been asked to — that is no argument," said a spokesman for the council.

"And there is no point going to see them because their plans are a side issue.

"The only issue is the fact they have no right to be there.

"The council is

looking into all the uses for the building, but we cannot act until the squatters are out.

"Until they have gone we cannot manage the building prop-

erly or make it secure."

The council will meet the squatters in the Royal Courts of Justice on Friday morning.